

Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2022

Remarks on Signing Legislation Establishing the Commission To Study the Potential Creation of a National Museum of Asian Pacific American History and Culture Act

June 13, 2022

The Vice President. Good afternoon. Good afternoon. Please have a seat. Good afternoon, everyone.

President Biden, Speaker Pelosi, Members of Congress, and my fellow Americans: It is an honor to be gathered with you today and to be joined by so many former colleagues from the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus. In particular, Congresswoman Grace Meng, you did so much to make this day possible. Thank you for that.

So when my mother was 19 years old, she came to the United States from India to become a breast cancer researcher. Growing up, my mother made sure that my sister Maya and I learned of the important, glorious history of Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders in America. Because that, of course, is part of the history of America. To teach this history is to help all of us as Americans understand where we come from. And to teach this history is to help us understand who we are.

The National Museum of Asian Pacific American History and Culture will teach and tell the story of our country. This is a story about heroes who shaped our Nation for the better, from the South Asian Americans who helped transform farming up and down the Pacific coast, to the Japanese Americans who defended our freedom during World War II, to the Chinese American garment workers who marched through the streets of New York City 40 years ago to win better pay and benefits for all workers.

This is also a story about some of our country's darkest moments: the Chinese Exclusion Act, the internment of Japanese Americans, the murder of Vincent Chin, discrimination against South Asian Americans after 9/11, and today's epidemic of hate, which is fueling violent acts against many communities, including the AA and NHPI community.

Because, you see, this is also American history, and we must teach it as it really happened so that we can learn from our best moments and learn from our darkest moments and, in particular, then, to ensure they are never repeated, our darkest moments.

By equipping people with knowledge and historical context, then we can fight ignorance, dispel misinformation, and work toward a future where all people can live without fear and a future where all people—all people—can help write the next chapter of American history.

With that, it is my great honor to introduce the President of the United States, Joe Biden.

The President. Thank you. Thank you. Good afternoon, folks. And thank you, Kamala. I think I should just stop right there—[*laughter*]—because if anybody can talk about this, Kamala can, like so many of you in the audience.

You know, it's good to see you as well, Doug. Must be hard following this act all the time. Right? [*Laughter*] You do it well.

Today I'm honored to sign into law something that's long overdue, and—the National Museum of Asian and Pacific American History and Culture here in Washington, DC. You can clap for that because of this lady here. [*Applause*]

And I want to thank the many Members of Congress who made this possible, especially Grace. Grace, stand up. *[Applause]* No, and she started early. She's not new to this. I think it was—the first time you introduced it was 2015. Is that right? Yes. Well, you're only 7 years ahead of everybody else.

Well, all kidding aside—and Judy as well is here and Doris Matsui and Speaker Pelosi. And Senators who couldn't be here today because they're not in session right now, but they—including Mazie Hirono and Tammy Duckworth and Chuck Schumer—all members of the Congressional Pacific—Asian Pacific American Caucus.

While this bill was being—been working its way through the Congress the past decades, its story behind it goes back centuries. Throughout our history, beyond what the Vice President pointed out, Asian American, Native Hawaiians, Pacific Islanders have literally shaped the history and the contours of this country.

As I said last month at Asian History—Asian American History Month reception in the Rose Garden we had, there's no single Asian American, Native Hawaiian, or Pacific Islander identity. The diversity of their cultures is significant. And the breadth of achievement is equally as broad and significant. The enrichment of our country has been—our communities—not just the country, but down to individual communities—the impact that the community has had.

All of it has been defined by who you are and who we are as a nation. And it's defined us. And all of it is an embodiment of so many of you here today. Leaders in civil rights like Karen Nagasaki *[Narasaki]** and Karen Korematsu. Where are you? Where are the Karens? *[Laughter]* There you go.

And military men like four-star General Tony Taguba. Stand up, will you? Come on. He's the only one I can say "stand up" to because I'm still the Commander in Chief to him. *[Laughter]* I'm serious, you've made a hell of a contribution.

In the arts and sciences, like the father of Erika—*[laughter]*—Moritsugu. Where is that guy? There you go. Dad, stand up. Now, I was asked by your daughter not to do that. *[Laughter]* But how can I not do that? She's the one who advises me on all these things.

And too many business and public service people to mention, and so many, so many more. And many of you in the audience—we should go through all the contributions you've all made.

And it's about time for a national museum to capture the courage, the character, and the imagination. And maybe, from my perspective, looking from a little bit from a distance, is the dreams and the heart and the soul of the generations of our fellow Americans who came before you and all of you. That's what this law is going to do. That's what it's going to do. It's going to create a Commission that will examine how to make the museum a reality, including whether it should be part of the Smithsonian.

Now, we did this with the last—we did this with other museums as well. This is the process. And the fact of the matter is, it's similar to the process that the African American History and Culture Museum, the Latino History and Culture Museum, and the National Women's History Museum. Some of you are in both these museums, by the way, you know. *[Laughter]*

And it comes at a critical time—all kidding aside. It comes at a critical time. This year marks 1 year since the murder of six Asian American women in Atlanta, a symbol of the anti-Asian hate in America today.

This year commemorates the 80th anniversary of the incarceration of 120,000 American citizens who were Japanese Americans during World War II, which included—if you excuse my

* White House correction.

reference to two friends—it included a dear friend who, as a child—the late Norm Mineta—who went on to serve—he was in those camps when he was a child—went on to serve in the United States Army and in Congress and the Cabinet. A commemoration at a time where there are those who seek to whitewash the history in our schools, what took place.

And I think—if you'd excuse it again, in Senate language, a point of personal privilege—I want to thank my dear friend who's not here, the late Danny Inouye, who taught me so much about so many things. A Japanese American who tried to join—from Hawaii, but a Japanese American—who tried to join the military when the war broke out, who had to fight to enlist in the United States military out of high school.

Danny would recall what his father told him. And I remember Danny telling me—I had to go back and check this today—but I remember Danny telling me about this years ago. He said, "America has been"—this is what his dad said. "America has been good to us, Danny. It has given us—given me two jobs. It has given you and your sisters and brothers an education. We all love this country. Whatever you do, do not dishonor your country. Remember, never dishonor your family. And if you must give your life, do it with honor." End of quote.

Danny served in the famed 442d Regimental Combat Team during World War II. And, I might add, he earned the Medal of Freedom, and he also went on to do so much more.

I was going to tell a story about he and Bob Dole, but I'm going to take too much time. *[Laughter]* For the 50th anniversary of D-Day, when we—they both got shot and mortally wound—badly wounded on mountaintops—I was with them both—on mountaintops in Italy, on the west coast, that were literally, as the crow flies, less than 2 miles from one another. The same time, same day. Anyway.

Today, it's clear that the battle for the soul of America continues. That's why a museum like this is going to matter so much. Museums of this magnitude and consequence are going to inspire and educate. More than anything else, it's going to help people see themselves in the story of America, a story that makes us a better America, and it's made us a better America.

And that's why it's so important to me that this administration looks like America—the people representing them looks like America—starting with a Vice President, including Cabinet members and the staff at every single level.

It's important to sign this bill with all of you here and—who—and from every walk of life. You represent every aspect of American life, many of whom will likely be celebrated in this museum as well.

Let me close with this: Maya Lin, born in Ohio and the daughter of Chinese immigrants and the architect of the Vietnam Memorial on the Mall and recipient of the Presidential Medal of Freedom, said, "It's not a matter of finding an idea, but allowing the idea to find you." This museum is going to help the idea find so many American souls, so many people from around the world who will one day walk in this museum and better understand the idea of America, the only nation—the only nation, in my view—that can be defined in one single word: possibilities. Possibilities.

Much earlier, my ancestors came, but your ancestors came. What did they come for? Because they believed there was possibilities here unlike any other nation in the world. Possibilities. And you've all proven it.

And now I'm going to ask Speaker Pelosi, Grace, Judy, and the other members of the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus to join me on stage while I sign this bill into law.

And I look forward, one day, to visiting the National Museum of Asian Pacific American History and Culture with all of you. Okay?

[At this point, the President walked to the signing desk.]

All right. Now, I don't know why they do this, but they only give me one pen. *[Laughter]* I used to stand in absolute awe and watch Barack Obama sign with seven, eight, nine different pens "Barack Obama." *[Laughter]*

Vice President Harris. I'm in awe. *[Laughter]*

[The President signed the bill.]

The President. I'm going to give this pen to Grace, and all of you will get a pen.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:21 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Douglas C. Emhoff, husband of Vice President Harris; Rep. Judy M. Chu; Karen K. Narasaki, former Commissioner, U.S. Commission on Civil Rights; Karen Korematsu, founder and executive director, Fred T. Korematsu Institute; Maj. Gen. Antonio M. Taguba, USA (Ret.); and White House Asian American and Pacific Islander Senior Liaison Erika L. Moritsugu, and her father, former Deputy U.S. Surgeon General Kenneth P. Moritsugu. H.R. 3525, approved June 13, was assigned Public Law No. 117–140.

Categories: Bill Signings and Vetoes : Legislation establishing the Commission To Study the Potential Creation of a National Museum of Asian Pacific American History and Culture Act, signing remarks.

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Names: Chu, Judy M.; Duckworth, L. Tammy; Emhoff, Douglas C.; Harris, Kamala D.; Hirono, Mazie K.; Korematsu, Karen; Lin, Maya Y.; Matsui, Doris; Meng, Grace; Moritsugu, Erika L.; Moritsugu, Kenneth P.; Narasaki, Karen K.; Obama, Barack; Pelosi, Nancy; Schumer, Charles E.; Taguba, Antonio M.

Subjects: Armed Forces, U.S. : Servicemembers :: Casualties; Armed Forces, U.S. : Servicemembers :: Deployment; Armed Forces, U.S. : Servicemembers :: Service and dedication; Civil rights : Minorities :: Minority rights and ethnic tolerance; Civil rights : Racial equality; Civil rights : Women's rights and gender equality; Congress : House of Representatives :: Speaker; Congress : Senate :: Majority leader; Holidays and special observances : Asian American History Month; Medals, decorations, and awards : Medal of Freedom; White House Office : Vice President.

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